

Sanity tips for home-based consultancy success

By Heidi Alexandra Pollard

So you've decided to take the plunge and start your own home-based consultancy. You have grand ideas of being your own boss, visions of leisurely days, working in your jeans, having time to 'do lunch' with your friends around your work time.

For those of you, like me who have been working from a home office for sometime you will know only too well that often the line between work life and home life soon blurs. When I started I often found myself putting on a load of washing before I wrote a proposal for a workshop, or cleaning up the kitchen before returning a call. Hello real world home office! So much for increased productivity and flexibility.

Over the past two years I have spent some time trying to work out how to keep some of my time structured and some of it flexible. Here are some of the tips I have found to help keep me on track:

Tip #1 Create a work space

Keeping a separate, distinct work area in your house will assist you to still be able to go to work when you need to and switch into work mode. I am fortunate to have a spare bedroom that I use as an office however I also share this space with my husband and for him time on his computer is for leisure so I have had to at least define part of the desk space as the 'office'.

Tip #2 Plan your work week

Just as you would have used your calendar or outlook when working for someone else to schedule your time and account for your activities, so too you can allocate your time when self employed. For example, if you regularly exercise try to do it at the same time every day - create the habit (I walk my dog at 6am every day). If you commit to start work each day at a certain time, then keep that commitment with yourself and keep the pattern and habit a part of your every day.

Tip #3 Let technology be your friend.

Client meetings are very valuable when appropriate as there is nothing quite like face to face communication, but schedule them only when required. For correspondence in between sessions or meetings where possible try to use the assistance of technology such as phone, fax, email and if you love technology like I do, use your blackberry or similar device so you can keep in touch with urgent emails and appointments even when you are out of the office. Also make absolutely sure that you get separate lines for your business phone, fax, and internet, the days of the home phone/fax are over!

Tip #4 Keep time zappers at bay.

Many of your friends and family will see you as suddenly available now you are working from home. For me the biggest zapper is my husband who is semi retired and just loves asking me to run errands for him in between clients. It is very hard to be clear on boundaries but so important if you want to be effective in your business. When zappers call you simply to chat, politely remind them that you're working, and ask them if you can call them back after work or at your designated break time. I allow myself an hour and a half each day for lunch from 12.30 - 2pm and use that time to run all my errands such as going to my PO Box and the bank, so I make it very clear to hubby that if I can fit the errand into my break time then I will do it.

Working as a solopreneur has so many benefits and pluses and can be very rewarding if you form good habits early on. I hope you find these tips useful in your journey to becoming a successful home-based consultant.

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